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SUBJECT: Update on Plans for New Detroit River Crossing

Ref: (A) Toronto 2255 (B) Toronto 2778 (notal)

Sensitive but Unclassified - Protect accordingly.

11. (U) Action request contained in para 12.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a closed-door session on October 19, 2005 in Detroit, the Corradino Group described to U.S. federal and state government officials the status of the Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) study of potential new border crossings and plaza sites on the U.S. side of the Detroit River. The DRIC study results will not be released to the public until November 28. Environmental and construction issues dictate construction of a new bridge, rather than a tunnel, thereby ruling out the Detroit River Tunnel Partnership Proposal (also known as the "Jobs Tunnel"). A combination of social and environmental factors led the study to focus on centrally-located crossings between downtown Detroit and Windsor. Any of the proposed alternatives would be directly connected to Interstate 75 on the U.S. side. By November 4 the Federal Highway Administration is seeking concurrence from all concerned federal and state agencies with the proposed centrally located sites (see para 12). On November 28 the recommended sites will be released to the general public in both Canada and the U.S. END SUMMARY

13. (SBU) In a day-long closed-door session on October 19, 2005 in Detroit, Joe Corradino described to U.S. federal and state government officials (including Poloff) the status of the DRIC study of potential new border crossings and plaza sites on the U.S. side of the Detroit River (NOTE: The Corradino Group, a consultancy firm specializing in engineering, planning, and construction projects, is conducting the research and analysis and producing the U.S. version of the DRIC study under contract with the Michigan Department of Transportation. END NOTE). Corradino outlined how and why several potential crossings had been eliminated from the study in the past few months.

Centrally-located Bridge Beats Out Tunnel

14. (SBU) Corradino said constructing a new tunnel has been ruled out because of the geology of the Detroit River bed (solid rock - nearly impossible to bore through -- with a very thin overlay of sediment -- not enough to keep a tunnel placed on top of the rock from floating to the surface) combined with the need for at least six additional lanes of traffic to meet future projected traffic volume. According to Corradino, the Detroit River Tunnel Partnership proposal (also known as the "Jobs Tunnel") was eliminated because it would not significantly improve regional mobility and would not allow for a sufficient additional volume of traffic to provide redundancy for the Ambassador Bridge (NOTE: the Jobs Tunnel would only provide two additional lanes of cross-border traffic. END NOTE). Potential down-river crossings were eliminated after consultations with the public, he said. Potential crossings upriver from downtown Detroit and Windsor, including those near Belle Isle, were eliminated for environmental reasons.

15. (SBU) Corradino observed that the U.S. portion of the study is now focused on mid-river bridge crossings in the vicinity of the existing Ambassador Bridge and truck ferry. The relatively narrow channel at this site will enable a bridge to be constructed entirely out of the navigable channel. This means the biggest challenges for the project will be social rather than environmental, he said.

16. (SBU) Corradino said that, if the Canadian side rejects a potential site, the U.S. would also drop it. David Wake, Windsor Project Coordinator for the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, agreed that, if the U.S. side finds a potential crossing to be unacceptable, Canada would likewise no longer consider it.

17. (SBU) Wake noted that Canadian experts, who are proceeding on a separate but parallel track, also agree that the central area under consideration is the most promising. Wake said the Canadians rank order the central area crossings differently, noting that the Ambassador Bridge site ranks poorly from a Canadian perspective because of the impact a new/additional plaza and more traffic on Huron Church Road would have on downtown Windsor (ref (B)).

18. (SBU) U.S. and Canadian experts are focused on narrowing the range of potential crossing and plaza sites for a new publicly-funded crossing of the Detroit River. They acknowledge that their rejection of a potential site would not preclude a private sector entrepreneur from requesting and obtaining the needed permits to construct and operate a new crossing without public sector financing (ref (B)). The twinning of the Ambassador Bridge and Detroit River Tunnel Partnership proposals could be constructed without public sector endorsement by the DRIC study.

Geologic and Diplomatic Planning Constraints

19. (SBU) Unmapped brine wells, some of them 1,200 feet deep, which predate the 1900s, could complicate the placement of bridge footings on both sides of the river, Corradino observed. In the coming months the U.S. will conduct a \$2 million geological-technical analysis to determine where bridge footings could be placed on the U.S. side.

110. (SBU) James Kirschensteiner, Assistant Division Administrator (Michigan) of the Federal Highway Administration, said the DRIC study has not considered co-locating U.S. and Canadian border facilities at a new crossing site since negotiations to conclude a Shared Border Accord are not yet completed. Corradino said his group is identifying potential plaza sites of between 100 to 200 acres, to accommodate future inspection needs. Plazas on the U.S. side of the river would have a dedicated connection to I-75. Wake noted the Canadians are looking for 80 to 100 acre sites for plazas, per request of the Canadian Border Services Agency.

Next Steps

111. (SBU) Wake said Canadian experts will publicly unveil their conclusions about practical alternatives on November 28, when the Canadian side will brief concerned local government councils. Public meetings to discuss the conclusions will be November 29 through December 1 in Windsor, LaSalle and Amherstburg. Mohammed Alghurabi, DRIC Project Manager, Michigan Department of Transportation, said the U.S. side will also publicly announce the selection of practical alternatives on November 28. U.S. public meetings to discuss the conclusions will be held from December 5 to 8 in the Detroit metro area.

112. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Department is requested to provide informal concurrence with the centrally-located practical alternatives for a future Detroit River Crossing by November 4 to James Kirschensteiner (James.Kirschensteiner@fhwa.dot.gov) (NOTE: All involved federal and state government agencies -- Department of Homeland Security (Customs and Border Protection and Coast Guard), General Services Administration, Army Corps of Engineers, Interior Department (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Michigan Department of Transportation -- have been asked to provide comments to the U.S. Department of Transportation by November 4. END NOTE). A copy of the draft report has been express-mailed to WHA/CAN.

SCHIMMEL